Chapter 53
ONCE UPON A TIME LONG AGO, A DIFFERENT PEOPLE CALLED THIS LAND HOME.
THESE PEOPLE HAD NO LEADER...
...BUT A WOMAN FROM A FARAWAY REALM...
...SAT UPON THE EARTH AND CONCEIVED IN HER BELLY A CHILD OF HEAVEN.
THIS WOMAN OF NOBLE BLOOD WAS KNOWN AS THE QUEEN MOTHER...
...AND THE CHILD SHE BORE POSSESSED EYES THAT COULD SEE EVEN ON MOONLESS NIGHTS.
WITH HIS POWER OF INSIGHT, HE BECAME THE VERY FIRST EMPEROR TO RULE OVER THIS LAND AND ITS PEOPLE.
THE LEGEND OF THIS NATION'S FOUNDING... WHO'D WANT TO LEARN ABOUT THIS?
WE'VE ALL HEARD THE STORY AT LEAST ONCE, IF NOT A MILLION TIMES BEFORE.

A BUILDING MOSTLY IN ONE PIECE IN THE RUN-DOWN NORTHERN GROUNDS OF THE INNER COURT HAS BEEN RENOVATED ...
...TO HOUSE THE TRAINING SCHOOL, WHICH IS NOW UP AND RUNNING.
I RECOGNIZE SOME OF THE GIRLS IN THE CLASSROOM.
I WAS CURIOUS ABOUT THE SCHOOL MYSELF...
...SO WHEN JINSHI INVITED ME, I ENDED UP JOINING HIM.
SIR JINSHI, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO SEE YOUR FACE.
YES, I KNOW.
THE GIRLS ARE IN THE CLASSROOM AND KEEN TO STUDY...
...BUT WITH A CREATURE LIKE THIS PEEKING IN ON THEM, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO FOCUS AT ALL.
...WE COULD ONLY MANAGE ABOUT 20 OF THEM, HMM?
I'M TOLD THERE WERE ONLY AROUND TEN TO START WITH, SO 20 IS AN IMPROVEMENT.

...AND IS MOVING ON TO READING SIMPLE STORIES.
IN FACT, XIAOLAN HAS ALREADY LEARNED HOW TO READ A LOT OF EVERYDAY WORDS...
IF JINSHI'S PLAN IS A SUCCESS...
...AND THEY'RE ABLE TO RAISE THE LITERACY RATE AMONG THE MAIDS...
...THE FUTURE INNER COURT IS SURE TO LOOK QUITE DIFFERENT THAN IT DOES NOW.
SIR JINSHI, WE SHOULD GET GOING.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
MAY I STAY AND OBSERVE A LITTLE WHILE LONGER?
REPORT BACK ON ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT THE SCHOOL.
I SHALL.

Chapter 53 The Shrine of Choosing ①

OH? MAO-MAO!
YOU CAME!
HAVE YOU MANAGED TO LEARN A LITTLE MORE?
HEH HEH HEH! I STILL HAVE A WAYS TO GO!
INSTRUCTIONAL TEXTS ARE PROVIDED, BUT SINCE PAPER AND BRUSHES WOULD BE CONSUMED THROUGH USE...
...THEY'VE PREPARED TRAYS OF SAND IN THEIR PLACE.
THE STUDENTS LEARN HOW TO WRITE BY TRACING THE CHAR-ACTERS INTO THE SAND.
ISN'T THIS SPOT YOU'RE LOOKING AT NOW A BIT AHEAD OF THE CLASS?
OH YEAH. I'M NOT TOO QUICK...
...SO I NEED TO READ AHEAD A LITTLE, OR I CAN'T KEEP UP WITH THE CLASS.
I'M GONNA ASK OUR TEACHER SOME QUESTIONS AFTER. WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME WITH?

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, SIR! MIND IF WE COME IN?
I DON'T THINK I'VE MET THAT YOUNG LADY WITH YOU BEFORE.
OF COURSE. WELCOME.
THAT'S THE ELDERLY EUNUCH WHO WAS READING FROM THE TEXTBOOK EARLIER.
I'M JUST TAGGING ALONG.
OH?
WELL, FEEL FREE TO TAKE A SEAT OVER THERE WHILE YOU WAIT.

SHE ALMOST SEEMS LIKE HIS GRAND-DAUGH-TER.
IS THAT...A SHRINE?
IT SEEMS IN BETTER REPAIR THAN MOST OTHER BUILDINGS HERE...
...BUT IT ALSO LOOKS OLDER THAN THE INNER COURT ITSELF.
PERHAPS THERE'S SOME RELIC ENSHRINED IN THERE FOR WORSHIP.
I WONDER IF IT'S DIVIDED INTO A LOT OF SMALLER ROOMS INSIDE.
EVEN SO, IT SEEMS AWFULLY LONG AND NARROW, AND ITS PILLARS ARE RATHER CLOSELY SPACED.

A BIT.
I WAS JUST THINKING HOW UNUSUAL THE ARCHITECTURE IS.
CURIOUS ABOUT THAT BUILDING?
THAT SHRINE WAS BUILT BY THE NATIVES OF THIS LAND.
...THE WOMAN WHO GAVE BIRTH TO THE FIRST EMPEROR IN THE FOUNDING LEGEND.
HE MUST MEAN...
...CHOOSING INSTEAD TO USE IT WISELY TO RULE OVER THEM.
...DID NOT DENY THE PEOPLE THEIR FAITH...
THE QUEEN MOTHER WHO CAME FROM AFAR...

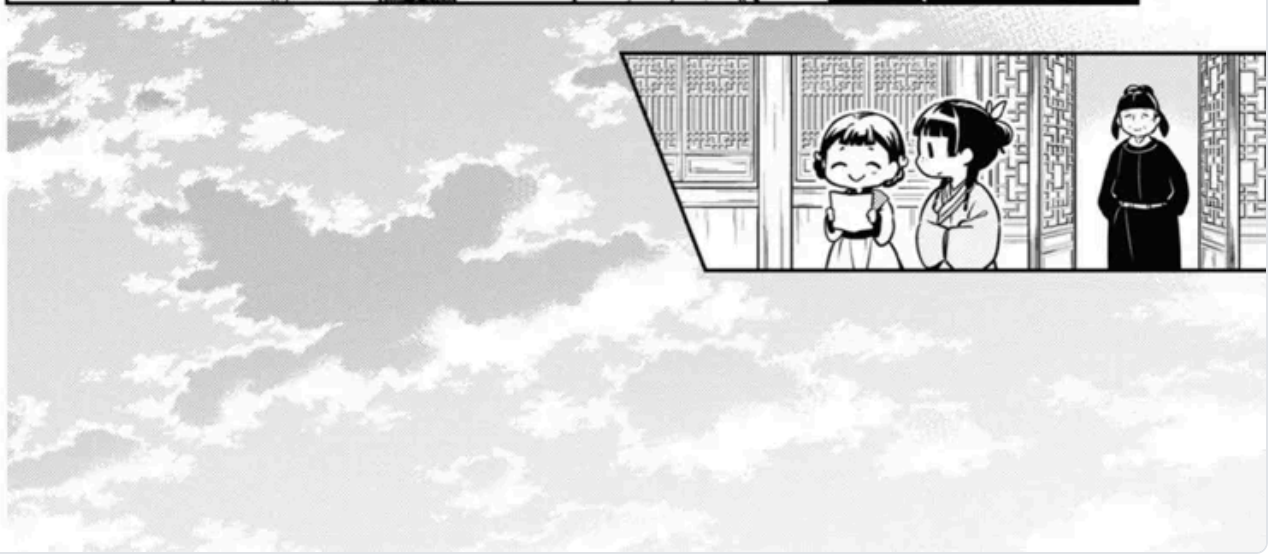
EVER SINCE THEN...
...THOSE WHO WOULD BECOME RULER OF OUR NATION MUST PASS THROUGH THAT SHRINE.
THE SHRINE IS ALSO THE REASON THE CAPITAL WAS RELOCATED HERE.
OHH...
THE QUEEN MOTHER SAID...
...THAT ANY WHO COULD TAKE THE CORRECT PATH THROUGH THE SHRINE WOULD LEAD THE PEOPLE.
HER SON, HAVING PASSED THE TEST WITH FLYING COLORS, WENT ON TO RULE THE LAND AS ITS FIRST EMPEROR.
SO IT'S A RITE OF PASSAGE TO BECOME EMPEROR.
BUT IT HAS BEEN DECADES SINCE IT WAS LAST USED...
...AND I DOUBT IT MAY EVER SEE USE AGAIN.

ALL THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR'S ELDER BROTHERS WERE KILLED OFF BY AN EPIDEMIC.
WITH ONLY ONE REMAINING HEIR TO THE THRONE...
...THERE WAS NO NEED TO USE THE SHRINE.
OHH.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
BUT DARK RUMORS ABOUND...
...WITH SOME HINTING THAT THE EMPRESS PLOTTED IN SECRET TO BRING ABOUT THE DEATH OF HER SON'S BROTHERS.
IT'S TRUE.
THAT'S WHY THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR, WHO WAS THE YOUNGEST SON, ENDED UP ON THE THRONE.
STILL, THIS OLD EUNUCH...
HE SPEAKS ABOUT THE IMPERIAL FAMILY SO CASUALLY, BUT I DON'T SENSE HOSTILITY IN HIS WORDS.
IT'S AS IF HE'S A SCHOLAR STATING FACTS IN AN OBJECTIVE MANNER.
IT'S BEEN QUITE A WHILE SINCE I LAST ENCOUNTERED SOMEONE WITH ANY INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT...
...LIKE YOURSELF.

SOMEONE ELSE WAS ONCE INTERESTED IN THE SHRINE AS WELL?
YES. AN ECCENTRIC PHYSICIAN WHO WORKED HERE LONG AGO.
!
...SPEAKING OF A DOCTOR NAMED LUOMEN BY ANY CHANCE?!
...ARE YOU...
WHENEVER HE WAS FREE, HE WOULD MILL ABOUT THE INNER COURT...
...AND GAZE AT THE SHRINE THE WAY YOU WERE DOING.
MY PA, LUOMEN, MAY APPEAR TO BE A SENSIBLE MAN...
...BUT THE TRUTH IS, HE'S AN ODDBALL WHO PLANTED A PLETHORA OF MEDICINAL HERBS ALL OVER THE INNER COURT.
OH? YOU KNOW OF HIM?
HE WAS CAST OUT OF THE PALACE AS A CRIMINAL...
...SO MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT HIM UP.

I WONDER IF THEY WERE FRIENDS...
LUOMEN, HMM...
...HE TOOK ME IN.
HE RUNS A SMALL APOTH-ECARY NOW.
IS THAT RIGHT ...?

OHH, WAY TO GO.
I MANAGED TO WRITE IT!!
MAOMAO, LOOK!



HO THERE, FOOD TASTER.
THE JADE PALACE, TWO DAYS LATER
I SHOULD LIKE YOU TO COME WITH ME.
?!
I'M INCLINED TO ATTEMPT THE SHRINE OF CHOOSING NOW.
...HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

THEY DON'T SEEM TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON EITHER.
HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY SUMMONED JINSHI AND GAO SHUN TOO?
WHAT IN THE WORLD IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN HERE?

I HAVE BEEN AWAITING YOUR ARRIVAL.
IT'S THE TEACHER FROM THE MAIDS' SCHOOL.
MAY I TRY TO PASS THROUGH ONCE MORE?
THE OUTCOME MAY REMAIN THE SAME, HOWEVER MANY TIMES YOU TRY, YOUR MAJESTY.
THE INSOLENT TONE HE USES IN SPEAKING TO THE EMPEROR MAKES ME CRINGE.
DO YOU REQUIRE AN ATTENDANT THIS NIGHT?
GACLANK
ガチャーン

HMM.
YES.
I SHALL HAVE THESE TWO JOIN ME.
!!
I CAN UNDERSTAND BRINGING JINSHI SINCE HE PERFORMS RITUALS AND SO ON, BUT WHY ME?
WHAT EXACTLY IS HIS MAJESTY AFTER HERE?
GRIN

UM...
ARE WOMEN ALLOWED TO ENTER THE SHRINE?
にこ SMILE
にこ SMILE
THE QUEEN MOTHER AND THE EMPRESS WERE BOTH WOMEN.
.....

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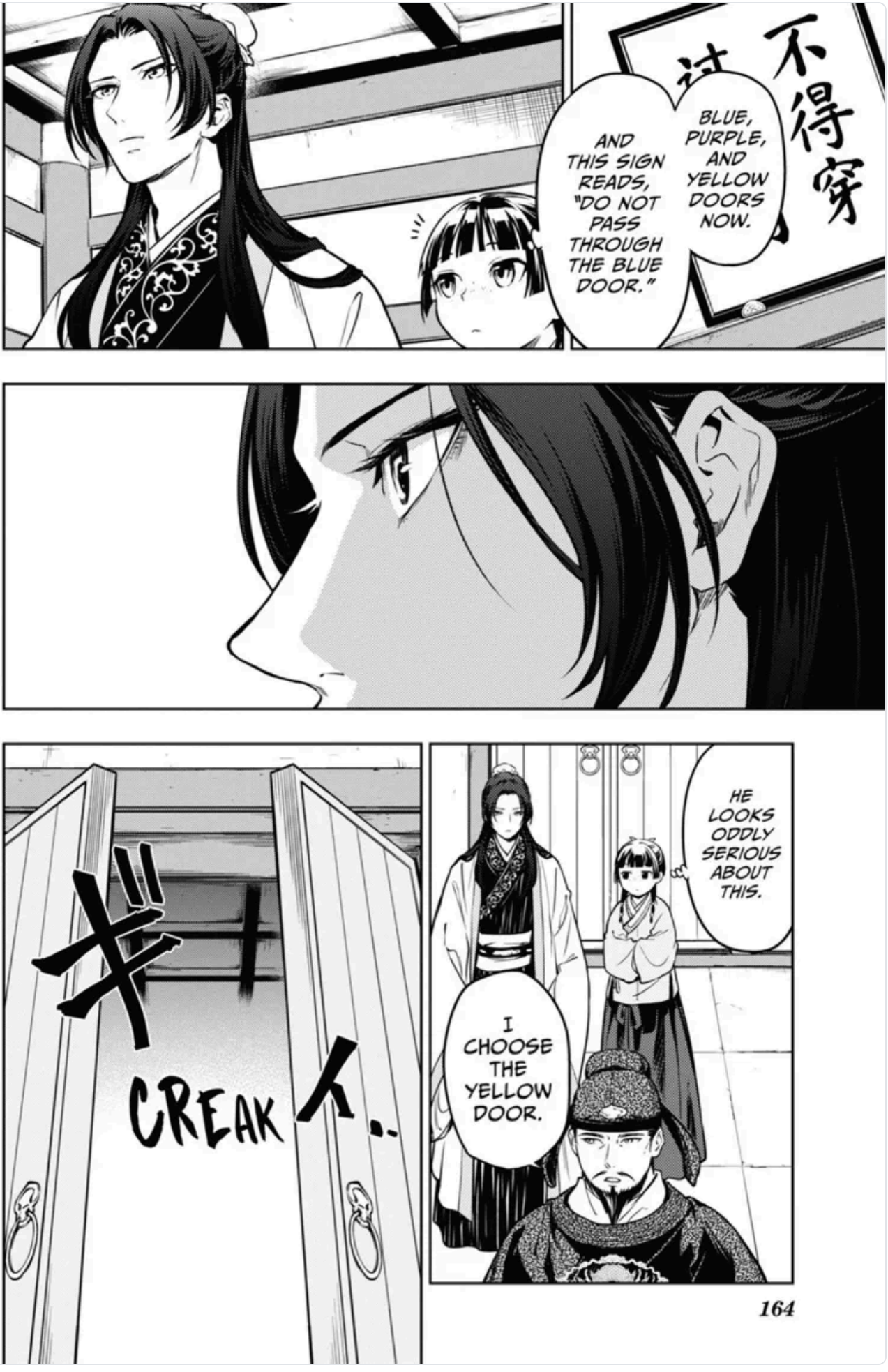
NOW, WITHOUT FURTHER ADO...
PLEASE MAKE YOUR WAY INSIDE.
BAM
不得穿
过红门
THERE ARE THREE DOORS IN DIFFERENT COLORS: A BLUE ONE, A RED ONE, AND A GREEN ONE FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.
ABOVE THEM, A PLACARD READS, "DO NOT PASS THROUGH THE RED DOOR."
WHICH DOOR WILL YOU CHOOSE?

I CHOSE GREEN LAST TIME, SO LET'S GO WITH BLUE.
QUITE RIGHT.
THEN LET US PROCEED THROUGH THIS DOOR.
门穿
NOW WHICH DOOR WILL YOU CHOOSE?
RED, BLACK, AND WHITE DOORS THIS TIME.
ALL RIGHT.
THE RED ONE IT IS.
AND YET ANOTHER SIGN... THIS ONE READS, "DO NOT PASS THROUGH THE BLACK DOOR."
不得穿
过黑门

THE UPKEEP IS NO EASY MATTER, I TELL YOU.
...YOUR MAJESTY COMES CALLING OUT OF THE BLUE, WANTING TO HAVE ANOTHER GO...
JUST WHEN I THOUGHT THIS SHRINE WAS READY TO FALL INTO DISUSE...
CREAK
COMPARED TO THE WALLS AND THE PILLARS, THE DOORS ARE VIVID AND IN PERFECT CONDITION.
THAT MUST BE BECAUSE THE OLD EUNUCH KEEPS REPAINTING THEM.
不得穿过盖门
HERE IS THE NEXT SET OF DOORS.
HOW LONG IS THIS GOING TO GO ON FOR ANYWAY?
IT'S AS IF THEY BUILT THIS PLACE LIKE A MAZE TO MAKE YOU LOSE YOUR SENSE OF DIRECTION.


不得穿过
BLUE, PURPLE, AND YELLOW DOORS NOW.
AND THIS SIGN READS, "DO NOT PASS THROUGH THE BLUE DOOR."
ギィ
CREAK
HE LOOKS ODDLY SERIOUS ABOUT THIS.
I CHOOSE THE YELLOW DOOR.
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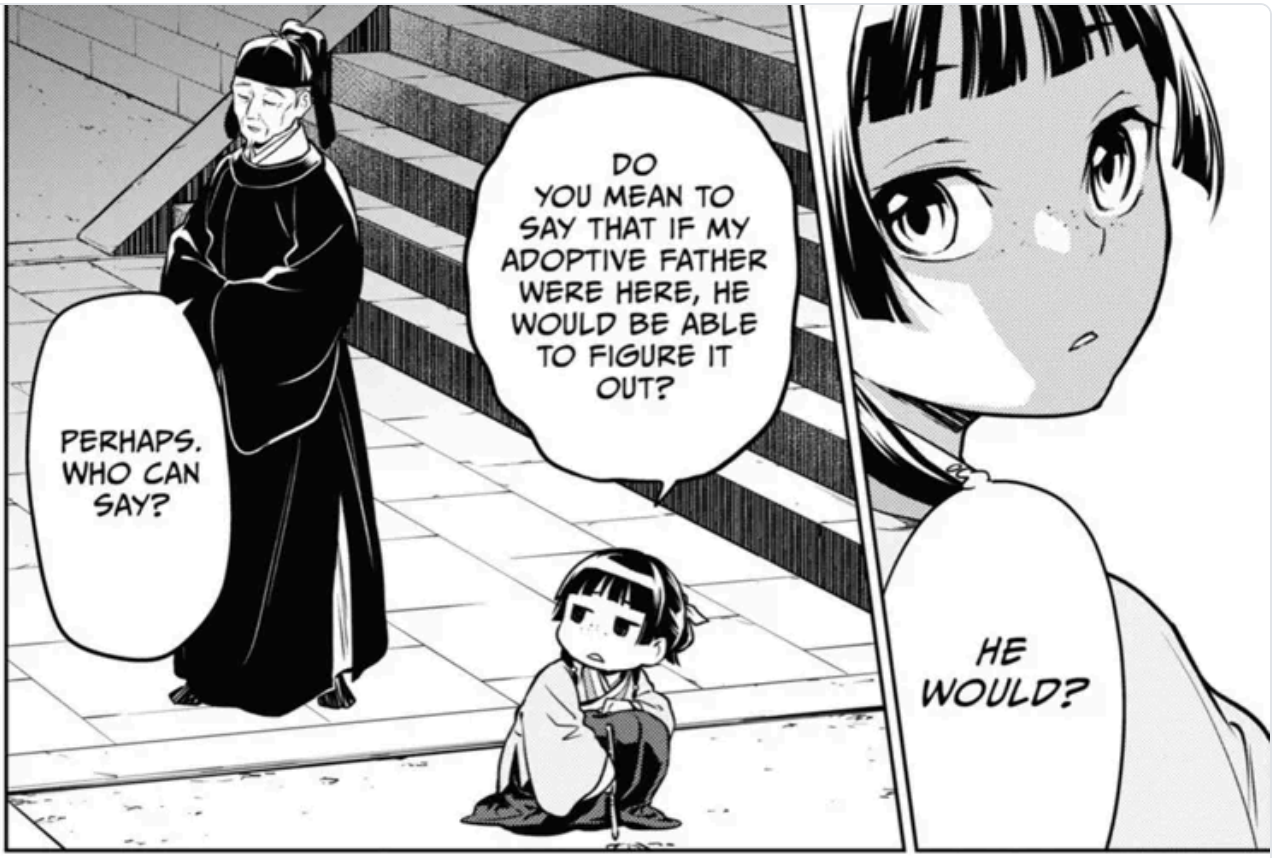
"YOU MAY BE A CHILD OF THE KING...
"...BUT YOU ARE NO CHILD OF THE QUEEN MOTHER."
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT'S SUPPOSED TO MEAN, BUT IT'S AN OBVIOUS DISAVOWAL.
THIS APPEARS TO BE THE LAST DOOR.
汝是王之子
但非王母之子

AND SO MY RESULTS REMAIN THE SAME.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, YOUR MAJESTY?
DOES THIS MEAN IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO KNOW THE WILL OF HEAVEN?
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WILL OF HEAVEN.
...I BECAME ITS SOLE CARETAKER.
WHEN THIS SHRINE CAME TO BE LOCKED AWAY WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE INNER COURT...

THERE'S SOMETHING PROUD IN HIS MANNER.
PERHAPS HE CHOSE TO BECOME A EUNUCH...
...SO THAT HE COULD ENTER THE INNER COURT AND CONTINUE TO PROTECT THIS SHRINE.
I SHALL GUIDE YOU OUT.
THE EMPEROR DID AS ALL THE SIGNS SAID...
...SO WHY DID THE SHRINE DENY HIM?
WAS THERE SOME KIND OF DOUBLE MEANING TO THE DIRECTIONS?
WAS IT THE NUMBER OF ROOMS ...?
OR THE COLORS OF THE DOORS HE CHOSE ...?
I'M SURE LUOMEN WOULD KNOW.


DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT IF MY ADOPTIVE FATHER WERE HERE, HE WOULD BE ABLE TO FIGURE IT OUT?
PERHAPS. WHO CAN SAY?
HE WOULD?

...WHILE I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO FIGURE IT OUT.
IT'S ALMOST LIKE HE'S IMPLYING THAT PA WOULD KNOW...

PA'S MEDICAL KNOW-HOW IS ESPECIALLY EXCEPTIONAL.
DOES THAT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT?
BUT THIS OLD EUNUCH'S DISMISSAL DOES NOT SIT RIGHT WITH ME ONE BIT.
PA'S BRILLIANT, IT'S TRUE.

IS THERE SOME KIND OF TRICK TO IT?
不得穿过监门
THREE DOORS, THREE COLORS, AND...
STAAARE
STARE AT ME ALL YOU WANT...
...BUT I'M NOT MY PA, SO THE ANSWER WON'T COME TO ME SO EASILY.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS BY "YOU ARE NO CHILD OF THE QUEEN MOTHER"?

"CHILD OF THE QUEEN MOTHER" ...?
THE THRONE OF OUR NATION HAS BEEN PASSED DOWN THROUGH MALE HERED-ITARY SUCCES-SION.
THROUGH THE PATERNAL LINE, AS IT WERE.
IT IS SAID THAT IN MOST CASES ...
...BOYS INHERIT THAT WHICH MAKES THEM MALE FROM THEIR FATHERS...
BUT IN THE FOUNDING LEGEND, THERE IS NO DEPICTION, MUCH LESS A MENTION, OF THE EMPEROR'S FATHER.
...AND GIRLS INHERIT THAT WHICH MAKES THEM FEMALE...
...FROM THEIR MOTHERS.

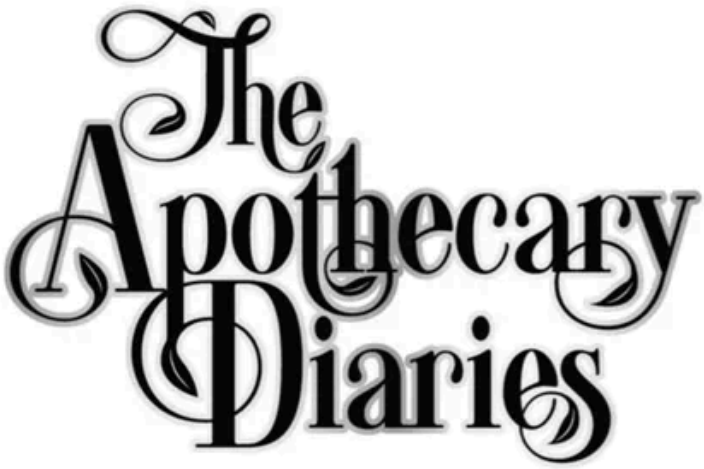
汝是王之子
但非王母之子
"YOU MAY BE A CHILD OF THE KING...
"...BUT YOU ARE NO CHILD OF THE QUEEN MOTHER."
...IS INTENDED TO ENSURE THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER'S BLOODLINE REMAINS A PART OF THE IMPERIAL LINE?
WHAT IF THIS RITE OF PASSAGE ...
...WERE ALSO...?
...BUT ARE RUMORED TO HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN ASSAS-SINATED BY THE EMPRESS...
AND WHAT IF THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR'S BROTHERS WHO DIED IN THE EPIDEMIC...

...SIR JINSHI.
WERE THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR'S BROTHERS ALL BORNE BY THE SAME MOTHER?
SO THEY WERE CLOSE KIN.
?
NO, NOT ALL...
...BUT I'VE HEARD THAT THE MOTHERS OF THOSE PRINCES WERE SISTERS.
I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION THAT MAY COME ACROSS AS INSOLENT.
WILL YOU ALLOW IT, YOUR MAJESTY?
LET'S HEAR IT.
FOR MEN OF NOBLE BLOOD...
...MARRYING SISTERS OR CLOSE RELATIVES IS NOTHING UNUSUAL.
CASE IN POINT, CONSORT LIHUA HERSELF IS RELATED TO THE EMPEROR.

THOSE IN THE IMPERIAL LINE WHO HAVE TAKEN THE THRONE THROUGH THE GENERA-TIONS...
DID SOME OF THEM HAVE POOR EYESIGHT?

GRIN
BUT NOT THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR... HE HAD GOOD EYES.
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I'VE HEARD THAT MANY IN THE LINE HAD ISSUES WITH THEIR SIGHT.

MAY WE PLEASE ...
...GO THROUGH THE SHRINE ONE MORE TIME?
THE APOTHECARY DIARIES 10 • End


The Apothecary Diaries

Thanks for reading
The Apothecary Diaries,
Volume 10!
There are so many gorgeous women in this story that every time another beauty appears among this bevy of beauties, she raises the hurdle a little higher! It's been a fun challenge to draw!
From the artist,
Nekokurage
SPECIAL THANKS.
ASSISTANTS Kai Kazaha, Asaha, Hamano, Izumi
COMPILATION Itsuki Nanao
ORIGINAL Natsu Hyuuga
Touco Shino
My editor, you, the readers, and everyone else involved!

✧ BIG THANKS AS ALWAYS ✧
Author: Natsu Hyuuga
Light novel illustrator: Touco Shino
Manga artist: Nekokurage
The editor
You, the readers
We've finally reached Volume 10!
I hope to see you in Volume 11 as well!
Itsuki Nanao

Story by Itsuki Nanao *Art by* Nekokurage

THIS IS ME BEING GENTLE.
CAN'T YOU BE ANY GENTLER ...?!
Story by Itsuki Nanao
Art by Nekokurage